

St. Matthew's Episcopal Church  
St. Mary's Road  
Hillsborough  
Orange County  
North Carolina

HABS No. NC-273

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NC,  
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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D.C. 20240

Historic American Buildings Survey

Name of Structure - St. Matthew's Episcopal Church (re-organized, August 23, 1824)

Address - Hillsborough, Hillsborough Township, Orange County, North Carolina (Churchyard adjoins the eastern boundary of the town.)

Present Owner - Wardens and Vestry of St. Matthew's Episcopal Church.  
Hillsborough  
North Carolina

Present Occupant - St. Matthew's Episcopal Church

Present Use - As a church.

Brief Statement of Significance - A very early and pleasing example of Gothic church architecture in North Carolina. Associated with the name of Francis Lister Hawks, grandson of John Hawks, designer of Tryon Palace, and also with that of John Berry, gifted native brickmason-architect of Hillsborough. Church itself linked with some of North Carolina's most eminent persons: Thomas Ruffin, the Camerons, Hills, Webbs, Collinsees, Grahams, Joneses, etc., etc.

Date of Erection: 1825-1826. Consecrated May 21, 1826.

Architect: Indications are that an informal collaboration was carried on between Francis Lister Hawks, then a Vestryman, and John Berry, brickmason-architect.

Builder, suppliers, etc: Probably John Berry or John Berry in partnership with Samuel Hancock did the actual brick work.

Original Plans, Construction, etc. - Vestry Minutes indicate that the church originally was a simple brick rectangle. Its entrance tower was added in 1830, only four years after the consecration and dedication of the church. Almost no other external changes have been made. The church did not provide a gallery originally (this was added in 1835). It did contain wainscoting or paneling which was replaced in 1868 or 1875 by tongue-and-groove boarding. Thomas Tileston Waterman (who attributes the building to Francis L. Hawks) calls it "the first appearance of Gothic influence" (Johnston and Waterman, The Early Architecture of North Carolina, p. 264) and says, "The Gothic Revival took early hold of church building in North Carolina, Saint Matthew's, Hillsboro....being a picturesque example. This diminutive church of red brick with high-pointed, arched windows and sharp spire, is singularly effective in a sylvan setting high on a knoll. It is the work of the Rev. Francis L. Hawks, grandson of John Hawks, architect of Tryon's Palace" (p. 247). An almost identical church, St. Luke's Episcopal Church, was built in Salisbury, N. C., in 1828.

Physical History:

Original and Subsequent Owners:

(Note: The entire history of St. Matthew's Churchyard, its additions, the building of its wall, the construction of the adjacent Parish House, etc., is in the files of the Hillsborough Historical Society.)

St. Matthew's Episcopal Church was actually built on land belonging to Chief Justice Thomas Ruffin who gave it verbally to the church as a memorial to his courtship of young Anne Kirkland. Traditionally he is said to have proposed to her in a summer house on the knoll where the church now stands. Actually, some thirty years went by before Justice Ruffin deeded 1 1/3 acres to St. Matthew's.

April 10, 1854 (Deed Book 34, 404-406)- Thomas Ruffin of Alamance County deeds to the Wardens and the Vestrymen of St. Matthew's Protestant Episcopal Church.... (a tract) ...containing One Acre and one third of an Acre and including the Protestant Episcopal Church called and known as Saint Matthew's Church."

(Note: The Hillsborough Historical Society has recorded in its files all available Material concerning the first unconsecrated St. Matthew's Church on public Lot 98, said to have burned in the 1790's.)

Notes on Alterations and Additions:

The builder of the square entrance tower is unnoted in the Vestry Minutes. The tower has been repaired and reworked at various times because of cracking. These chief alterations and additions have been made:

- 1830 - entrance tower added
- 1835 - gallery added (supported by plain Doric columns)
- 1850 - tower rebuilt
- 1868-1869 - extensive remodeling of the Church carried on during the Rectorship of the Rev. Moses Ashloy Curtis. The former flat ceiling was replaced by a high, open one with exposed beams, and the east end of the Church was enlarged to permit a recessed chancel (with triplet windows), vestry, and organ room.
- 1868 or 1875 - original pine wainscoting replaced by tongue-and-groove boarding; slender 4-sided spire added (total height of tower and spire - 65').

Stained glass windows, two of Tiffany glass, have been added at various times.

Eva Ingersoll Gatling believes that all the alterations to St. Matthew's were the work of John Berry since all were done in his lifetime and bear certain distinctive Berry touches (see her article, "John Berry of Hillsboro, North Carolina," Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians, X (March, 1951), 18-22.

Historical Facts Connected with Structure -

St. Matthew's Episcopal Church has been associated with a long, long list of names great in North Carolina history: Bishop John Stark Ravenscroft, Rev. Francis Lister Hawks, Walker Anderson, William Norwood, Chief Justice Thomas Ruffin, Rev. Moses Ashley Curtis (the famous botanist), and many more.

Important Old Views: None of great age.  
(Location)

Sources of Information: (1) Joseph Blount Cheshire, Bishop of North Carolina, "An (Location) Historical Address Delivered in Saint Matthew's Church, Hillsboro, N. C., on Sunday, August 24, 1924, Being the One Hundredth Anniversary of the Parish," Printed by Order of the Vestry, Durham, N. C., 1925; (2) Eva Ingersoll Gatling, "John Berry of Hillsboro, North Carolina," Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians, X (March, 1951), 18-22 (church pictured and discussed); (3) Minute Book of the Vestry of St. Matthew's Church (unpublished). The Minutes skip from 1843 to 1854; (4) Berry Papers, Duke University Library; (5) Frances Benjamin Johnston and Thomas Tilston Waterman, The Early Architecture of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, Univ. of N. C. Press, 1941, 1947, pp. 247, 264. Pictured and discussed. (6) The North Carolina Guide, ed. Blackwell P. Robinson (Chapel Hill, 1955) discusses St. Matthew's Church on p. 112 in article, "Architecture," by Louise Hall, A. I. A., Duke University and again on p. 488. (7) Orange County Deed Books, Orange County Courthouse, Hillsborough, N. C. (St. Matthew's is pictured in several postal card series, guide books, etc.)